

Media & Trump: Flipping the Orwell Narrative

NEWS FEBRUARY 15, 2017 News Decoder 7



U.S. President Donald Trump and Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe at the White House, 10 February 2017. (AP Photo/Pablo Martinez Monsivais)

News-Decoder is devoted to examining multiple perspectives on major issues. Today, Prof. Emily Metzgar of Indiana University discusses the media's approach towards U.S. President Donald Trump. Prof. Metzgar's views diverge from others that have appeared on this site, but we think it is important to present different, even conflicting viewpoints, in a respectful way. Readers might keep in mind what Prof. Metzgar wrote six months before last year's U.S. presidential election in her piece entitled "U.S. 'Flyover Country' Sends Election Signal." In that article, she noted that it made perfect sense for many people in middle America to vote for Donald Trump.

By Emily T. Metzgar

The opening pages of George Orwell's novel "1984" acquaint the reader with the Two Minutes Hate, a daily ritual profoundly effective at unleashing anger, derision and obscenities from the audience.

The object of their deep-seated and primal animosity is a figure identified as Emmanuel Goldstein, the Enemy of the People. Day after dreary day in the fictional Oceania, Goldstein is trotted out as a symbol of all that is wrong with those who fail to believe rightly. And every day, enmity is unleashed toward him anew.

But, as the novel's narrator observes, although bounteous vitriol is spewed daily, Goldstein's "influence never seemed to grow less. Always there were fresh dupes waiting to be deceived by him."

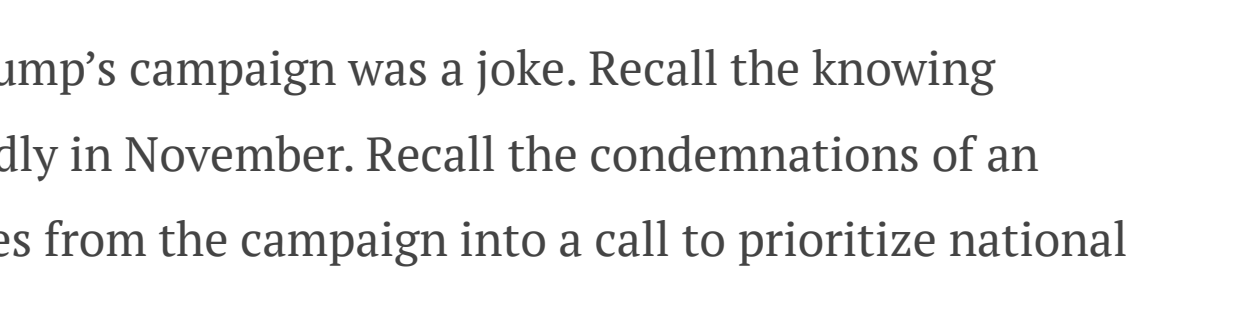
As the narrator reflects: "The horrible thing about the Two Minutes Hate was not that one was obliged to act a part, but that it was impossible to avoid joining in."

For the American press, it is de rigueur to offer comparisons between Orwell's "1984" and the American political environment of 2017.

The media that is engaged in efforts to whip the public into a frenzy.

Writing in The Atlantic, an enthusiastic high school teacher argued that in the age of Trump, "1984" is more important than ever. A commentator in The Huffington Post authored a piece titled "Orwell, Hitler and Trump," connecting "1984" and the authoritarianism he fears Trump will impose over the land.

And following the dust-up about disputed attendance figures for the inauguration, the trickle of "1984" references turned into a deluge, with recent headlines announcing that Orwell's dystopian novel is surging to the top of bestseller lists.



Logo for the supreme regime in Orwell's "1984" (Wikimedia Commons/Nirwraht)

The implications are clear: If one wants to avoid the fate of those in Orwell's Oceania, one should fear and actively militate against the Trump Administration. And the media will lead the charge.

Indeed, the mainstream press has been raging its own Two Minutes Hate against Donald Trump, spanning his entry into the presidential race, his securing of the Republican nomination and his unexpected victory in the general election.

Recall the smug assertions that Trump's campaign was a joke. Recall the knowing declarations that he would lose badly in November. Recall the condemnations of an inaugural address that wove themes from the campaign into a call to prioritize national interest above all else.

Contrary to the current narrative that the Trump Administration is practicing Orwellian double-think in its press briefings and interviews with journalists, stop for a moment to consider an alternative interpretation: It is the media that is engaged in daily efforts to whip the public into a frenzy in an increasingly crazed effort to delegitimize the President of the United States.

The media's approach suggests a tone-deafness to public cynicism.

To be sure, the Trump Administration is offering numerous opportunities for hard-hitting journalism and scathing commentary. But the media's current approach that models Orwell's dark, daily struggle sessions risks overwhelming an already distrustful public.

Indeed, the throw-everything-against-the-wall-to-see-what-sticks strategy is poised to backfire. It suggests a continuing tone-deafness to the cynicism with which the American public views the very institution of the media.

Take for example, approval ratings: According to Gallup, the president-elect had historically low approval ratings at inauguration, a fact that the media gleefully reported without any hint of self-awareness or irony — despite the fact that Trump's 45% approval rating was twice as high as the percentage of Americans expressing confidence in newspapers or television news in another Gallup poll (20% and 21% respectively).

The media appears so blinded by its hate for Trump that it is increasingly unable to focus its attention, its resources and its megaphone on truly consequential issues for the country such as nominees for the Supreme Court, treatment of refugees or the care and feeding of key relationships with strategic partners around the world.

Journalists need to choose their battles wisely.

How many people actually attended the inauguration is not consequential. Who got called on first at a press conference is not consequential. Definitions of fake news and alternative facts are not consequential.

It is a slippery slope, some argue. Let small things slide and suddenly the United States will be unrecognizable as a democratic nation, they say.

But the current mainstream media frenzy is both destructive and unsustainable. Journalists and commentators need to start choosing their battles wisely.

When every development is another step toward authoritarianism, fascism or some heretofore unseen abomination of democracy; when everything is unprecedented; when everything is outrage, the only thing to be delegitimized is the messenger itself. To channel Orwell's Newspeak, when everything is consequential nothing matters.

(The views are the author's.)

SHARE THIS: Facebook 0, Twitter, LinkedIn SHARE, WhatsApp, Email

TAGS: 1984, FEATURED, GEORGE ORWELL, MEDIA, U.S. POLITICS

CATEGORIES: DONALD TRUMP, FUTURE OF DEMOCRACY, GUEST WRITERS, NEWS, UNITED STATES

7 Comments Media & Trump: Flipping the Orwell Narrative

Chris FitzGerald says: February 17, 2017 at 01:09 Wow – her column almost anticipated Trump's weird press conference today.

Chris FitzGerald says: February 16, 2017 at 18:50 I think it's remarkable that this article fails to distinguish between reporting and opinion columns, that it does not cite examples or quote from the writing she attacks, and that it does not discuss the conduct of Trump and his coterie that the press finds so appalling. I was going to say it read like David Brooks column but even Brooks is getting into specifics these days.

Good spelling, though.

Bob Rowen says: February 16, 2017 at 18:30 This editorial is so biased as to fall into the category of fake news and so I don't see why this media gives it press. The stories about the size of the inaugural crowds and Trump's approval ratings received continued attention in the press because the Administration chose to contest them. The effort Trump gave to defending the size of his inaugural crowds legitimately deserved press coverage on its own. In fact, once the Administration stopped trying to spin this story, the story ended. Same with the stories about Trump's approval rating. Stories about who got called on first at a press conference? Sorry I simply have not seen them, and I receive a lot of news feeds. More importantly, entirely contrary to the premise of the editorial, the news media has focused extensively on the issues that matter... and there are many such issues, including the executive orders; the Judiciary (his unprecedented Presidential disrespect of the Judiciary); his cabinet appointments (especially in the context of his campaign promises); his Administration's extra-legal contacts with Russia; his misguided and dangerous approach to regulatory reform, the stalled (and hypocritical) efforts to revise Obamacare, and other substantive and important issues. There has, in fact, been a lot to criticize in the actions of this Administration and journalists are doing their job.

Chris FitzGerald says: February 16, 2017 at 18:57 Bob, I think your points are well taken apart from "fake news"; there are no actual lies as far as I can tell.

Jane Feldman says: February 15, 2017 at 17:04 Trump himself whipped up the crowds with his racist, sexist misogynist rhetoric during the campaign. He told his supporters that "in the good old days" protesters were treated in the manner they deserved. Those of us who protest (and I have been to three since January 21) are motivated not by the press, but by our own fears that Trump is trying to take us down the road towards fascism and totalitarianism, and that we will do whatever is necessary to prevent that from happening.

Bob Rowen says: February 15, 2017 at 17:13 I think this article is garbage. The examples she gives are news stories about inauguration crowds and approval rating. Both rightly stayed as news because the Administration chose to contest the reports. And both quickly slipped away from the focus as new stories emerged. And the press has done a great job on focusing and writing extensively about the issues that matter, such as the Supreme Court pick, such as the immigration ban and other executive orders, such as the unprecedented attacks on the Judiciary, such as the Cabinet picks, such as the contacts with Russia, etc etc. I recognize this is an editorial, but it is so biased and so ignores the facts around its subject that it falls into the category of "Fake News" and thus I am very disappointed that you chose to publish it.

LEAVE A REPLY

Your email address will not be published. Required fields are marked *

Comment

Name * Email * Website

☐ Notify me of new posts by email.

POST COMMENT

OUR MOST POPULAR POSTS

- Asian flu v. coronavirus: A different time, similar problem
- Young people take action against COVID-19
- Daddy abuse: I love you. Don't hurt me.

EMAIL UPDATES

Sign up to receive an email from us each time we publish new content.

Email Address

SUBSCRIBE

OUR TWITTER FEED

Tweets by @newsdecoder

News Decoder @newsdecoder Here's a must read for U.S. military history buffs! News Decoder correspondent Ben Barber provides a historical take on the U.S. military's global influence to examine President Trump's #AmericaFirst stance. #USA #Military #History #Afghanistan bit.ly/2Scr06i

Decoder: Why are U.S. troops ... Despite an isolationist president ... news-decoder.com

News Decoder @newsdecoder Is the @WHO to blame for the destructive sweep of COVID-19? Well, it's complicated. News Decoder intern @dcarlsonsrivert explains the role of the governing health body during crises like #COVID19 bit.ly/2yEqHw8

Decoder: WHO is world health ... Its mission is to protect the world ... news-decoder.com

News Decoder @newsdecoder Omobolaj Olatere is a student at @ALAcademy and is passionate about #womens empowerment. Bolaji depicts a fictional account of sexual violence, a type of violence that is prevalent in Africa, the continent with the world's highest rates of child abuse. bit.ly/2yE8aZO

Daddy abuse: I love you. Don't ... How should I feel towards a fathe... news-decoder.com

Embed View on Twitter